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ATHENS AND HELLENISM¹

TO imagine Athens during the last quarter of the fourth century B.C. as an object of pity is to ignore the unanimous opinion of contemporary rulers. Neither the defeat on land at Chaeronea, nor the more decisive defeat on sea at Amorgos; neither the murder of Phocion, nor the persecution of Theophrastus; neither the misery of its poor, nor the materialism of its rich, shook in the least its high prestige among the Macedonian generals who had surrounded Alexander.

The reason is not far to seek. With one hundred thousand inhabitants Athens was still the most populous city in the Greek world, as well as the busiest centre of the world's trade. It had never been so beautiful as now; for to the religious edifices of the Periclean age had been added the secular buildings constructed during the administration of Lycurgus—the marble theatre and stadium, the ship-houses and dockyards, the many sightly residences; it was now the greatest museum of the plastic arts in the world—one vast depository of statues of gods and men in marble and bronze, the accumulation of five or six generations of continuous effort; in the suburbs, at the three points most easily accessible from the city, were the gymnasia—courts for exercise and parks for recreation, pleasant retreats from the dust and bustle of the city, places of resort for the idle youth and the idler poor, the busy philosophers and the busier courtesans. Nowhere was there such a theatre and such music, such oratory, rhetoric, and philosophy. There was less homogeneity of culture than in the fifth century B.C., for in the interval an intellectual aristocracy had arisen with scientific interests that the populace did not share; but there was much greater refinement of feeling and elegance of living than ever before, and the

¹A paper read at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in New York, December, 1909.

comedies of Menander, though they conformed in plot, character-study, diction, subject, sentiment, and ideas to the taste of an educated *élite*, brought their rich store of suggestions to the same kind of audience as had greeted Aristophanes. It is not without meaning that in the *Samia* an old nurse is made to quote Euripides's Auge, and in the *Epitrepontes* a slave expounds a new-fangled, modish, rationalistic philosophy; it is not without significance that all the youth of Attica, urban and rustic, rich and poor, educated and less educated, lived together in Athens and in the forts by the harbor and frontiers for the entire period of their nineteenth and twentieth years; it is pregnant with import that both from above and without—for to Athens, as of old, came everybody who had anything new to communicate—a flood of ideas and impressions kept pouring in upon the Athenian populace, to stimulate discussion, compel fresh determinations of the values of human activities, and suggest more adequate universal syntheses. The upper classes sought to impose upon society an ordered propriety, which was irksome though not strait-laced, but they did not practise what they preached, and among the masses much of the old *abandon* persisted, fostered by the democratic inclination to live and let live *ὡς ἕκαστος βούλεται*. Nothing new was sound, nothing old was classic, nothing distinguished was immortal, except it had received the stamp of Athens. "Athens", said the most illustrious of the successors of Alexander, "is the one beacon tower of the world, from which the fame of men is flashed forth to the ends of the earth."

It is doubtful whether Antigonus I. had ever seen Athens with his own eyes, but he was no worse off, probably, than Ptolemy, Seleucus, Ophelas, and Lysimachus, but to all alike had come a glimmer of the wit, gaiety, refinement, and fascination of Athenian life with the famous courtesans—Thais, Glycera, Pythonice, Lamia—whom the spoils of the Persian Empire had attracted to their camps. Hence on settling down in Egypt Ptolemy sought to make Alexandria a new Athens. The *hetaerae* of Athens came without an invitation; the poets and scientists hesitated on receiving one, and a few only eventually accepted. He got the Attic laws with the Attic law-giver Demetrius, and for them he created "guardians" as in Athens. He constructed *phylae* on the Attic plan, and one of the Alexandrian demes was named Sunium. In the vicinity of Alexandria he laid off an Eleusis, and had Timotheus, an Eumolpid, come to inaugurate a branch of the Mysteries there. It was an Athenian, Demetrius, who wrote the hymn-book, and an Athenian, Bryaxis, who created the cult-statue for the new deity Serapis whom he put at the head of the religion in which he sought to unite

all the ethnic elements in his state. That might do for the capital of a satrapy. For the capital of the world, which Antigonos and his son, Demetrius Poliorcetes, strove to reunite under one government, more was needed. Hence they sought to make Antigonía—the later Antioch—a new Athens in very truth by transplanting to the Orontes to be its first settlers a colony taken directly from Athens, thus seeking to give an Attic atmosphere to their court in the way adopted three years earlier by Ophelas of Cyrene, who, on starting to join Agathocles for the overthrow of the Carthaginian Empire, took with him an Athenian queen and a large body of Athenian settlers. They were to give a pure Hellenic heart to the great kingdom which he hoped to found in the territory to be conquered in Africa.

There can be little doubt that Athens was regarded by the Macedonian nobles in Alexander's *entourage* as the bearer of the purest Hellenic culture, and that an effort was made to inoculate their new acquisitions with it by colonies judiciously planted.

At the end of the third century B.C.—despite the marvellous rise of Alexandria, Antioch, and Pergamum, and the fierce competition of Rhodes, coincident though they were with the commercial and political prostration of Attica—the esteem of Athens and the Athenians was not less in the Hellenistic courts. An intelligent and observant traveller from Asia Minor who visited Attica at about this time writes in the hacked style then common :

Thence to Athens. The road is pleasant, the land all cultivated, the prospect inviting. The city is everywhere dry, water being scarce ; and because of its age the streets and blocks are irregular. Most of the houses are mean, the nice ones few. A stranger would doubt, on seeing it first, if this were really the renowned city of the Athenians. After a little, however, he would be convinced. An Odeum, the finest in the world ; a notable theatre, large and excellent ; a costly temple of Athena, far-visible and well worth a visit, overlooking the theatre—the so-called Parthenon. It makes a great impression upon the spectator. An Olympieum, half finished, but displaying the general plan. It would be the best there is, if it were completed. Three gymnasia—Academia, Lyceum, and Cynosarges—with grounds thickly wooded and grassy, schools of philosophers of every shade of opinion. . . . There are banquets of all sorts, many snares and recreations of the spirit, unceasing shows. . . . Its inhabitants throw open its opportunities freely and are thus kind and helpful to all artists who happen along. The city is an admirable school of sculpture. . . . Some of the people belong to Attica, others are Athenians. The Atticans are inquisitive gossips, insincere, prone to blackmail and to pry into the private affairs of strangers. The Athenians are great-souled, simple in their manners, reliable custodians of friendship. Some informers run about in the city harassing wealthy visitors, but should the *demos* catch them, theirs would be a hard fate. The genuine Athenians are keen art critics and unwearying patrons of

plays, concerts, and lectures. In a word, Athens surpasses other cities in all that makes for the enjoyment and betterment of life by as much as other cities surpass the country. Be on your guard most especially against the courtesans lest you unwittingly meet a pleasant destruction.

The cynosure of Greece was thus Athens still; and the kings of the East and West vied with one another to add brilliancy to its fêtes, gifts to its treasury, and promenades, bazaars, and temples to its squares. To live at Athens was the proper way for a prince to round off his education, and finer qualities of mind and manners were expected of an Athenian scientist than of one from elsewhere. Hence it was not unnatural that, when Antiochus Epiphanes undertook to press more vigorously the measures which his ancestors had taken to insure the domination of Hellenism in Asia, he colonized Antioch anew from Athens, copied Attic institutions and Attic months, bestowed special privileges upon all Athenians resident in his empire, and chose Athens to receive along with Antioch a temple worthy, as Livy says, of the grandeur of Zeus—the deity, manifest in the king's own person, in whose worship he sought to unite his subjects of every race and language.

Rome too succumbed to the estimate current in the world of culture; and, after the final establishment of her hegemony in the East, she singled Athens out for special favors. In return for Lemnos, Imbros, Scyros, and Delos, which she restored to their common metropolis in 166 B.C., she received ten years later her first instruction in art and philosophy from the most eminent sculptors and philosophers of that city. Never had the cultural supremacy of Athens been more unquestioned than in the middle of the second century B.C.

Athens [affirmed the Amphictyonic Council] was the inaugurator of all human blessings, the guide of men from the life of beasts to gentle culture, the establisher, in fact, of the social organism altogether. This service she rendered through the dissemination of her Mysteries which inculcated the sovereign value of mutual aid and confidence among men, and through passing on to others the education and laws with which the gods had dowered her. Grain too, though given to her as her special property, she made everybody's heritage. She originated music and dramatic art, created and developed tragedy and comedy, and first established thymelic and histrionic contests.

This eulogy was embodied in a decree enacted in 117 B.C.; but already at that time men had begun to distinguish the Athenians from their ancestors. It was now that Polybius interpreted the preceding century of Greek history to the disadvantage of Athens, which he represented as a nest of pampered parasites; and the Romans, whose practical sense made it difficult for them to admit

that a people devoid of power might be possessed of virtue, began to treat the Athenians with a condescension allied to contempt which found expression in the memorable remark made by Sulla in 86 B.C. that he had spared the living because of the illustrious dead. A century later an officer high in the service of Tiberius described the inhabitants of Attica as "not Athenians, who have been exterminated by innumerable disasters, but the very dregs of humanity, to whom for a Roman to show courtesies is a dishonor to the Roman name". Athens was never so low in the judgment of its contemporaries as at the time of the first two *princes*.

To trace the attitude of Athens towards the Hellenistic states is of course impossible here—it differed so much at different times and in the case of different dynasties. It will suffice to note that opinion in Athens itself was generally divided; that one faction—the aristocratic or oligarchic—sought a haven for Athens and the government for itself by doing the will of Macedon; while another—that of the *demos*—strove for complete freedom within and complete independence in foreign politics; and a third—that of the moderates—aimed at the isolation of Athens, at securing its autonomy under a sort of international guarantee. Twice in the first century after Philip's death (in 301–295 and in 276–266 B.C.) the faction last mentioned carried its policy into effect by its own strength, but it was not till the *demos* abandoned its imperialistic traditions, during an unhappy generation of dependence upon Macedon (261–230 B.C.), and, taking the form of a tory democracy, accepted the doctrines of the moderates, that internal stability was achieved. The internationalizing of Athens was effected by the agreement of all the powers, the consent of Achaea, Aetolia, Boeotia, Macedon, Pergamum, Crete, Syria, Egypt, and Rome being still a matter of knowledge. The Ptolemies, however, in 224 B.C., made themselves in a special way responsible for the maintenance of the integrity of Athens; but in 200 B.C. Philip of Macedon ignored its neutrality and treated Attica with all the rigor of the new warfare which the Romans had introduced, whereupon the Athenians sent out a cry of horror, which, since the power of Egypt was prostrated in the same year by the great defeat at Panium, helped to bring the Italian Confederation definitely into the East. Rome thereupon became the guarantor of the position of Athens and the upholder of the tory democracy; so that the era of peace and stability was prolonged for almost an entire century. After the time of the Gracchi, however, the contemptuous attitude of the Roman senators and the outrageous behavior of the Roman business men, especially on Delos, alienated the sympathies of the Athenian government and people. At the

same time the division of the Roman aristocracy against itself and the outbreak of the urban proletariat, which accompanied the slave wars, the Teutonic peril, and the revolt of the client states, weakened the prestige of Rome; whereupon a disturbance occurred in Attica also, and a narrow commercial aristocracy seized the government in the hope of improving the conditions of Athenian trade and of preventing the city from breaking loose from Rome. It was the Social War which here as elsewhere fed the hopes of those whom Rome oppressed, and when it became clear that if unaided the Italians must fail to break the power of the common enemy a popular upheaval in Athens hurled the Roman partizans from the seat of power and the city joined Mithradates. Subsequently it was only a Roman municipality.

To trace the change of Athenian institutions under the pressure of Hellenistic ideas is also impossible here; for the development was not without set-backs and was unconscious for the most part, and hence very gradual. It will be sufficient to note that administration by the citizens themselves—be they all the people, or a few, or the men of property—by means of scores of committees constituted (by the lot ordinarily) of new men each year and holding office under the most jealous scrutiny for a single twelvemonth, went eventually out of use. During the storms of the age of the *diadochi*, which was the first critical period in the history of Athenian administration, many old offices were dropped and a few new ones were created to take their place. Athens had to reef sail while passing through the rough seas; besides, she had long had too much canvas for the size of the hull. The term of office, however, was lengthened in one instance only, that of the general superintendent of the administration. Repetition in the tenure of the new offices was generally prohibited; and the safeguards were left so far as possible undisturbed. But popular election was substituted for allotment in the designation of the most important officials, while at the same time the committees were replaced by single magistrates, or, where one was needed for Athens and another for the Piraeus, by two; and, when retained in form, were dissolved in fact in such a way that each member obtained his own department, the only notable exception being that of the archons, whose number was fixed at nine in order to leave unchanged the composition and size of the Areopagite council. The advantages of special fitness and inclination, and of personal liberty and responsibility, for administrative work were thus recognized, and by classifying the governors of the dependencies obtained in 166 B.C. with the military officials, in whose case reelection was always practised, the possibility of utilizing experience

was obtained; but the *demos* made a very sparing use of re-election and exercised the same sharp control over its officials as of old; hence the commercial oligarchy which came to power in 103 B.C. relieved magistrates from the judicial audit and permitted and promoted re-election everywhere, so that henceforth a man could look forward to an extended career in the public service as had been the case in the Hellenistic monarchies from the start.

As is well known, the Hellenistic period opened with a great migration from Greece into the Persian Empire. Hundreds of new *poleis* were founded out of citizens drawn from every part of the Greek world. The growth and prosperity, the very existence in fact, of many of them depended upon their attractiveness to settlers. In these circumstances there could be no thought of illiberality in the granting of civic rights. Hence the franchise was generally thrown open to all worthy comers. Since at the same time Rome put in practice a similar policy in Italy, there came from all quarters pressure on the old city-states of Greece to abandon their civic exclusiveness. This demand did not come alone. Into the new towns were drawn the natives who lived in the vicinity of each, so that their population was far from homogeneous in race and racial customs. A Macedonian who took an Egyptian, an Ionian who took a Syrian, woman to wife must devise a new set of conventions for the performance of their social duties. A Greek girl installed in a new home in Elephantine on the Nile or Seleucia on the Tigris was dependent upon her own resources to a much greater degree than was one who remained at home surrounded by her kinsmen and within easy reach of her natural guardian. She must be given freedom of access to the courts and personal right to hold property without which she would be entirely at the mercy of her husband. In other words, her parents were bound to see that privileges were guaranteed to her in the marriage contract which they would not think of demanding for their daughters who married their neighbors' sons. The instability of life, the enormous increase of opportunity to move from one place to another, made new safeguards of the home advisable. The consequence was that everywhere in the new world the old rules of society were being abandoned and new ones, of which—as in America in similar circumstances—a marked characteristic was an enlargement of woman's liberties, were being formed to take their place. There had been no such occasion for the creation of a new social régime since the seventh century B.C. In Athens there dwelt one alien and at least two slaves to every pair of citizen status, and, since many of them came from the East, the peril of political and social contamination was imminent. And with

it went the even greater danger of religious defilement, for which the conditions were also favorable.

The old deities of Athens were identified with a decaying order, and, though they were kept and sworn by and sacrificed to, they were kept as men keep old finery for which they have no further use, but which they do not care to throw away. The culture, moreover, which became at this time imperial, was under the patronage of deities of human origin—great men, living, like Ptolemy or Antiochus, or departed, like Zeus, Hercules, or Alexander, who could make laws, found cities, and render stable a social order, but who had no power to pardon sins or to solve the mystery of life and death. Accordingly, neither the religion of the city-state nor that of the new monarchies was in a position to offer a genuine religious resistance to the everlasting, omnipotent, universal deities of the Orient, who had never been touched with the frailty of mankind, but who could enter into men in spirit, as they had done in the past, and thus enable a revelation of doctrines, rites, purifications, and hopes, for which the sin- and sorrow-laden craved. Nor was philosophy any longer in a position to uphold the convictions of educated men. Its last word was the scepticism of Arcesilaus and Carneades, which made belief equally possible with disbelief.

Just when we are safest [says Bishop Blougram] there's a sunset
touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus ending from Euripides,—
And that's enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol on his base again.

For a long time Athens shrank from the advances of the new world, as Hippolytus from the love of Phaedra. The classical simplicity and restraint in art lived on there for generations, undefiled by the taste for pomp and magnificence, for striking effects in color, size, movement, and feeling, and for truth to nature in all its hideousness, as well as in all its beauty, which pervaded the Hellenistic monarchies. So, too, in politics Athens was distinguished by its conservatism. The oligarchs, on limiting the franchise to a minority in 321 B.C., annulled the grants of citizenship earlier made to foreigners; the moderates twenty years later added to a popular a judicial scrutiny before new citizens could be created; the democrats retained this, and in 229 B.C. fixed a limit to the value of property to be held by such as had passed the double

doors. Hence the contrast was so strong between the treatment of aliens in Athens and in Asia Minor, Antioch, or Alexandria, that towards the end of the third century Heraclides applies to their status the harsh term, slavery. It was not till the middle of the second century B.C. that the Athenians succumbed to the practice of Hellenism, but thereafter the fall from Brahminism was rapid and complete. The Areopagus was spotted with togas before the Mithradatic War, and by the time of Augustus the citizenship of Athens was a marketable commodity.

Instead of emancipating women Athens appointed *gynaeconomi* to restrict and regulate their appearances abroad. Instead of loosening the conventions of social life Athens drafted a new set of sumptuary laws. The precepts of Plato now brought persecution upon his school. The *Polity* of Zeno, in which differences of sex were ignored altogether, his followers sought to disown; and we can still discern in outline the huge mass of abuse which was cast upon the zealots who studied philosophy with Epicurus, or joined the Cynics in their vagabond life. The deadliest limitation imposed upon Menander was that of having to deal with social life and romantic love in a city which lacked them except in the borderland where *monde* and *demi-monde* met. Social disintegration did not take place in Athens till the second century B.C.; and it was not till after 229 B.C. that Athens gave to Cybele, Isis, and Atargatis public recognition and a public priest, so that it was not till then that citizens could form associations of *orgeones* for their worship, or worship them except in conjunction with foreigners in clubs of *thiasotae*. Nor had self-respecting men or women cared to enter the aliens' clubs earlier; for the spirit which brooded over Athens in the early Hellenistic age was that of Lycurgus of Butadae, and his pietism and fanaticism for archaizing had kindled an artificial glow of sentiment on behalf of the deities and cults of the city-state—the political entity which Athens was struggling to preserve. Hence the private religious associations with their grotesque rites and emotional excesses, which earned the scorn of Demosthenes, the sneers of Theophrastus, and the caricature of Menander, were not prohibited of course—for that was impossible—but were put under public control if they met in a public precinct, and put to the need of obtaining a public permit if they proposed acquiring a shrine of their own. They were thus barely tolerated, and to have anything to do with them imperilled social caste. In the second half of the second century B.C., however, these social and religious prejudices were overcome. Not only did the Oriental deities now receive the homage of aristocratic *orgeones*—among whom an occasional foreigner appears—but

Athenians of the best families sought membership in the foreign clubs, and the type of private religious association which multiplied most rapidly was the one in which aliens and citizens could enter freely without prejudice of social or political status. At the same time the Athenian nomenclature became variegated by the adoption of names of eastern deities, contemporary kings or courtiers, and noblemen from Italy—a clear mark both of the weakening of traditions and of social demoralization.

To speak generally. Through the acquisition of Delos Athens escaped from an eddy into the main current of Hellenistic life. The Athenians lost their distinctive characteristics; they adopted foreigners, and foreign names and ways, and thus became in reality and appearance a *conluries nationum*. They thereupon ceased to receive peculiar honor, which was henceforth reserved for their ancestors.

WILLIAM SCOTT FERGUSON.